



Washington State  
Department of Transportation

## SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program

Pontoon Construction Project



# SR 520 Pontoon Construction Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement Summary of Comments – July 2010



Washington State  
Department of Transportation

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## Introduction and background

### What is the Pontoon Construction Project?

The Pontoon Construction Project is one of four independent projects in the State Route (SR) 520 Bridge Replacement and High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Program.

The SR 520 Program is a collection of roadway projects designed to improve mobility and enhance safety throughout the SR 520 corridor and streamline operations on SR 520 and surrounding highways. The Pontoon Construction Project is a critical component of this program.

The SR 520 Evergreen Point Floating Bridge is nearing the end of its useful life and is vulnerable to catastrophic failure from windstorms. The Pontoon Construction Project involves building 33 pontoons needed to replace the bridge in its current configuration if a catastrophic failure occurs. To accomplish this, WSDOT would build a new facility for pontoon construction at one of two proposed sites in Grays Harbor. The project is needed now to shorten the time required to replace the SR 520 bridge if it were ever damaged beyond repair. If the bridge does not fail due to a catastrophic event, then all pontoons built during the project would be stored and used for the proposed bridge replacement.

Exhibit 1 shows the general location of the proposed Grays Harbor sites within the region. WSDOT is currently evaluating two locations to build a pontoon construction site, the Aberdeen Log Yard site in Aberdeen and the Anderson & Middleton site in Hoquiam. WSDOT has identified the Aberdeen Log Yard as the preferred alternative for the pontoon construction facility.

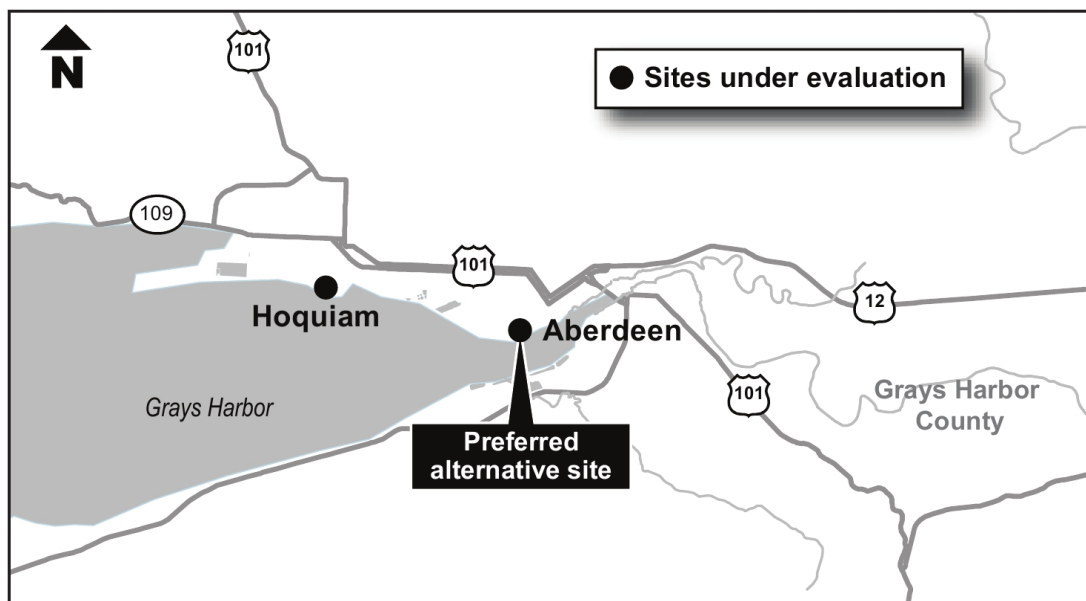


Exhibit 1: Proposed Pontoon Construction Facility sites.

## Why did WSDOT prepare a Draft EIS?

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are required to develop an environmental impact statement (EIS) as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) when potentially significant effects to environmental resources are anticipated. Before finalizing an EIS, a Draft EIS is released for the public, agencies, and tribes to review and provide comments.

On May 28, 2010, the Draft EIS was published and circulated to:

- Describe measures that will be implemented to avoid, minimize, or mitigate project effects.
- Allow for agencies, tribes and the public to review and comment on these topics prior to publication of the Final EIS.

A public comment period followed the publication of the Draft EIS, lasting from May 28, 2010, through July 12, 2010.

## What did WSDOT evaluate in the Draft EIS?

The Draft EIS includes evaluation of the following disciplines:

- Agency coordination and public involvement
- Air quality
- Description of alternatives and construction techniques
- Cultural resources
- Economics
- Ecosystems
- Energy
- Geology and soils
- Hazardous materials
- Indirect and cumulative effects
- Land use
- Navigable waterways
- Noise
- Public services and utilities
- Section 4(f) resources
- Social elements
- Transportation
- Visual quality and aesthetics
- Water resources



Exhibit 2: Cover of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.



## Draft EIS distribution, review, and comment opportunities

### How were the public and government entities able to review and comment on the Draft EIS?

The comment period is an important and required element of the NEPA process that allows the opinions of the public, agencies, and tribes to be considered during the environmental and project planning stage. WSDOT accepted comments on the project's Draft EIS from May 28 through July 12, 2010.

### Opportunities to review the Draft EIS

During the comment period, there were multiple ways to review the document.

- **Document distribution.** The Draft EIS and/or executive summary were distributed to more than 550 individuals or representatives of businesses, jurisdictions, agencies, tribes, and legislators for review. Each organization received either a hard copy, an executive summary with a compact disc (CD), or electronic access to the Draft EIS. Executive summaries and CDs were and will continue to be provided to the public at no charge.
- **Environmental hearing.** An environmental hearing and open house was held on June 24, 2010, at the Aberdeen High School cafeteria and community meeting room. Attendees were able to preview and discuss key environmental findings, which were on display and staffed by technical experts from each discipline. Approximately 75 people attended the public hearing, including representatives of several state legislators and a representative from Senator Patty Murray's office. Attendees were able to review the Draft EIS at this hearing.
- **Project web page.** The executive summary, the Draft EIS, and all technical appendices were available for review on the project website throughout the duration of the comment period. These documents will continue to be available through the project web page.
- **Libraries.** The Draft EIS was available for review at 13 different libraries in Aberdeen, Hoquiam, Montesano, Seattle, Tacoma, Tumwater, Olympia, Elma, McCleary, and Westport.

## Opportunities to comment on the Draft EIS

During the comment period, there were also multiple ways for people to provide comments on the document.

- **Environmental hearing.** The public could comment in any of the following methods at the June 24, 2010, environmental hearing at Aberdeen High School:
  - Complete a written comment form.
  - Provide a public testimony.
  - Speak to a court reporter individually.
- **Project web page.** An online comment form was available on the project web page throughout the duration of the comment period.
- **E-mail.** WSDOT created an e-mail address to exclusively receive comments on the Draft EIS during the comment period.
- **Comment form.** Comments could be sent to the project office.



Exhibit 3: Photo from the Draft EIS environmental hearing and open house on June 24, 2010.

## How was the public notified of the Draft EIS availability and comment opportunities?

Multiple methods were used to inform the public about the Draft EIS. An initial set of notification materials described the Draft EIS availability, opportunities to comment, and public hearing details.

### Draft EIS availability and environmental hearing notification

The initial set of notification materials included:

- **Legal notices.** Public notices were placed in the following publications, in compliance with NEPA and SEPA notification requirements:
  - Seattle Times on May 28.
  - The Daily World on May 28.
  - The Vidette on May 28.
  - The News Tribune on May 28.
  - The Tacoma Daily Index on May 28.
- **Notification mailer.** Approximately 47,000 notification mailers were mailed to all Grays Harbor County residents and businesses, to the project mailing list, and to the SR 520 Program mailing list on May 24.
- **Web update.** Draft EIS availability and environmental hearing announcements were posted on the project web page on May 28. Materials from the environmental hearing were posted on the web page on June 25.
- **Posters.** Posters were distributed to more than 100 businesses along the haul routes and to organizations that serve environmental justice populations, such as Grays Harbor County Public Health and Social Services.
- **E-mail updates.** Announcements were distributed to the Pontoon Construction Project contact list and the 4,000-member SR 520 Program e-mail list on May 28 to announce the release of the Draft EIS and provide notification about the environmental hearing. A hearing reminder was distributed on June 17.
- **Press release.** WSDOT distributed a press release to local and regional media outlets on May 28. The press release included highlights of the document, information on how to review and comment on the document, and information on how to attend the environmental hearing.
- **Media advisory.** WSDOT distributed a media advisory to local and regional media outlets on June 21. The media advisory reminded local media of the environmental hearing.



Exhibit 4: Example of display advertisement, which ran in regional online publications.



- **Community and jurisdictional briefings.** The project team provided a series of briefings to local jurisdictions and community organizations in Grays Harbor. The briefings were intended to expand public understanding of the purpose and key findings of the Draft EIS, encourage participation in the June 24 public hearing, and encourage public comments on the Draft EIS.

Date	Time	Briefing
Jurisdictions		
May 27	7 p.m.	Grays Harbor Council of Governments
June 8	9 a.m.	Port of Grays Harbor Commissioners
June 9	7:15 p.m.	Aberdeen City Council
June 14	9:45 a.m.	Grays Harbor County Commissioners
June 14	7 p.m.	Hoquiam City Council
Community Organizations		
June 2	8:30 a.m.	Grays Harbor WorkSource
June 2	12 p.m.	Aberdeen Rotary Club
June 2	2:30 p.m.	Grays Harbor College
June 8	1:30 p.m.	Friends of Grays Harbor / Grays Harbor Audubon / Surfrider Foundation
June 15	2 p.m.	Grays Harbor Marine Resources Council
June 17	12 p.m.	Hoquiam Rotary Club
June 17	5 p.m.	Grays Harbor Economic Development Council
June 22	11:30 a.m.	Grays Harbor Chamber of Commerce

- **Display ads.** The following display ads and radio ads were used to notify the public of the environmental hearing and opportunities to comment.

Date	Publication
Print publications	
June 3 – 6, 8 – 13, 15 – 20, 22 – 24	Daily World
Online publications	
June 3 – June 24	KDDS La Grand website
June 3 – June 24	Grays Harbor Radio (KXRO) website
June 4 – June 24	Jodesha Broadcasting's KBKW website
Broadcast media (radio)	
June 3 – June 23	Spanish Language Radio (KDDS LaGrand 99.3 FM)
June 3 – June 24	Grays Harbor Radio (KXRO 1320 AM)
June 4 – June 18	Jodesha Broadcasting Stations (KBKW, KSWW)

- **Spanish translation.** The following notifications and materials were translated to provide information to Spanish speakers about the public hearing and opportunities to comment:
  - Draft EIS mailer.
  - Draft EIS fact sheet.
  - Draft EIS hearing poster.
  - Radio ad (audio) and radio website ad (display).
  - Comment form.
  - A Spanish-speaking staff member was available at the environmental hearing to translate information and answer questions as needed.

## Comments and identified categories

The following terms will be used throughout the remainder of this comment summary:

- **Unique comment:** A letter, e-mail, transcription, or handwritten or typed comment form that a unique author or set of authors submitted. Identical comments submitted from different authors were each counted as a unique comment. Identical comments submitted from the same author (sometimes provided through different sources) were counted as one unique comment.
- **Types of respondents** who provided comments included:
  - **Public:** Individuals, community organizations and businesses.
  - **Government entities:** Agencies (federal, state or regional), jurisdictions (city or county), and tribes.
- **Category:** A specific topic discussed in and assigned to a comment. Attachment 1 provides a list of the categories used and the number of comments that discuss each category.
  - **High-level category:** A high-level category was selected when any associated sub-categories were selected. Examples of high-level categories are transportation, ecosystems, and noise.
  - **Sub-category:** A more specific category within a high-level category. For example, ecosystems categories include fish and aquatic resources, wetlands, and wildlife.

### Categorization process:

The project team identified common themes discussed within the comments and created 54 categories to quantify the number of comments that addressed each theme. Each comment was evaluated and assigned categories as applicable. Each category was only counted once per unique comment. After the categories were assigned to the comments, the comments and assigned categories were reviewed to ensure consistency.

The following examples show categories assigned to specific comments:

**Example comment #1**

*The Nation recommends title searches to confirm when the preferred sites' inter-tidal and sub-tidal lands would have initially been conveyed to the state or another entity, and as to what subsequent transaction occurred...it appears inter-tidal and sub-tidal lands existed on at least the southern end of the Aberdeen Log Yard as late as 1947 through 1971. Thus, the Nation believes that unresolved ownership issues could arise bringing into question the original authorization to fill in those aquatic lands. If proper official authorization were not verified, the Nation would propose that mitigation be provided for the original resource condition as though those conditions should have continued to exist today.*

**Assigned categories**

- Alternatives
- Alternatives – ALY
- Ecosystems
- Ecosystems – Wetlands
- Mitigation – Ecosystems

**Example comment #2**

*I wanted to commend you. In the research and analysis that you've done here, it looks like from the traffic map that we see there, that it would be the least amount of disruption to the traffic, to the Aberdeen site. We certainly appreciate the fact that you're planning on building these pontoons here and that the harbor nearly always needs more jobs. I think we run one of the highest unemployment rates in any place in the state.*

**Assigned categories**

- Alternatives
- Alternatives – ALY
- Economics
- Economics – Jobs
- General – Support
- Transportation

## How many comments did the project receive and who submitted them?

In total, the project received 32 unique comments from six different types of respondents. The chart below shows the number of unique comments received from each respondent type. A list of respondents is provided in Attachment 2.

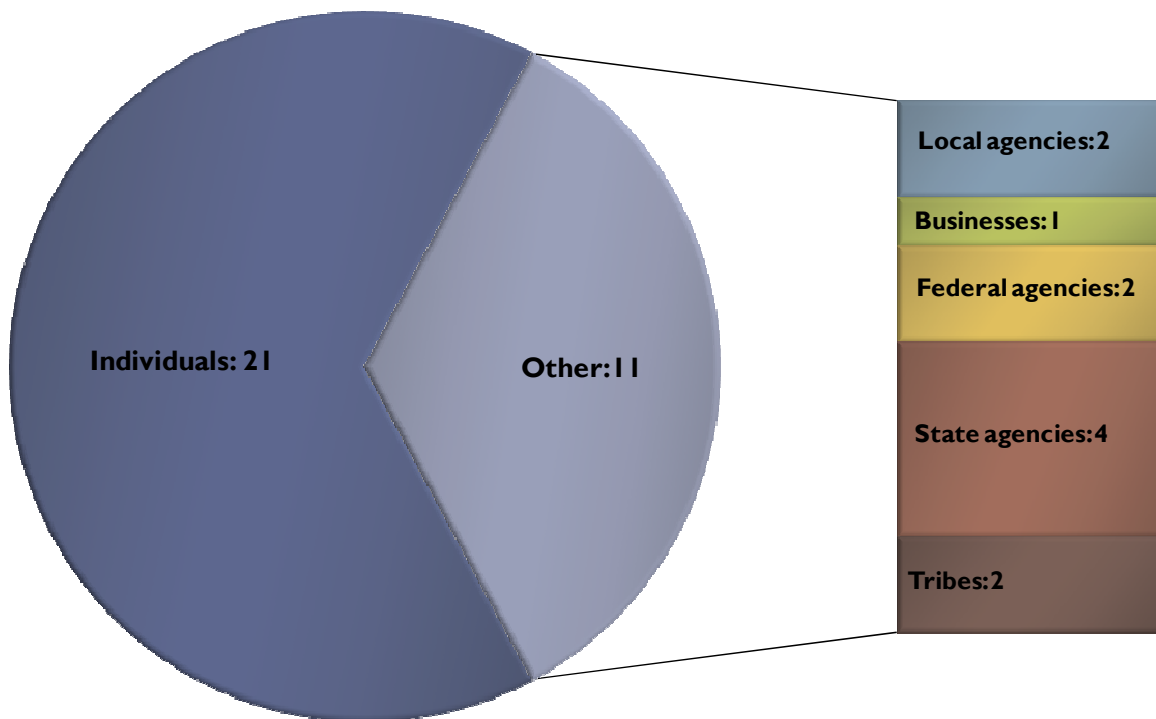


Exhibit 5: Types of respondents who commented on the Draft EIS.



## How did respondents provide comments?

Comments were submitted using the following methods:

- **E-mail address.** WSDOT received most comments through the Pontoon Construction Project Draft EIS e-mail address. As shown in Exhibit 6, 40 percent (13 comments) of the comments were provided through the e-mail address.
- **Environmental hearing.** Comments provided at the environmental hearing made up 28 percent (9 comments) of the total unique comments.
- **Website.** Comments submitted through the online comment form linked from the project web page made up 16 percent (5 comments) of the total.
- **Mail.** Hardcopy comments sent to the project office through the mail represented 16 percent (5 comments) of the total.

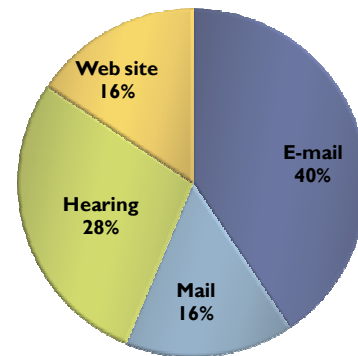


Exhibit 6: Source of comments received on the draft EIS.

## Key areas of interest

Comments covered a variety of topics, many specific to the Pontoon Construction Project and some pertaining to other WSDOT projects or the SR 520 Program in general. For example, some comments discussed construction of pontoons for the planned bridge replacement.

The percentages and numbers in this section refer to the categories used to quantify the topics identified within comments. Members of the public and governmental entities discussed many of the same key topics, although the categorization process shows different priorities between the groups, as described below.

The following sections provide examples of comments assigned to the most common categories. Examples provided may not represent all comments received on a particular topic. Spelling and typographical errors have been corrected as needed in the examples provided. Personal information has been removed from these examples if provided in the original comment.

The following 13 high-level categories were discussed most frequently among the total 32 comments:

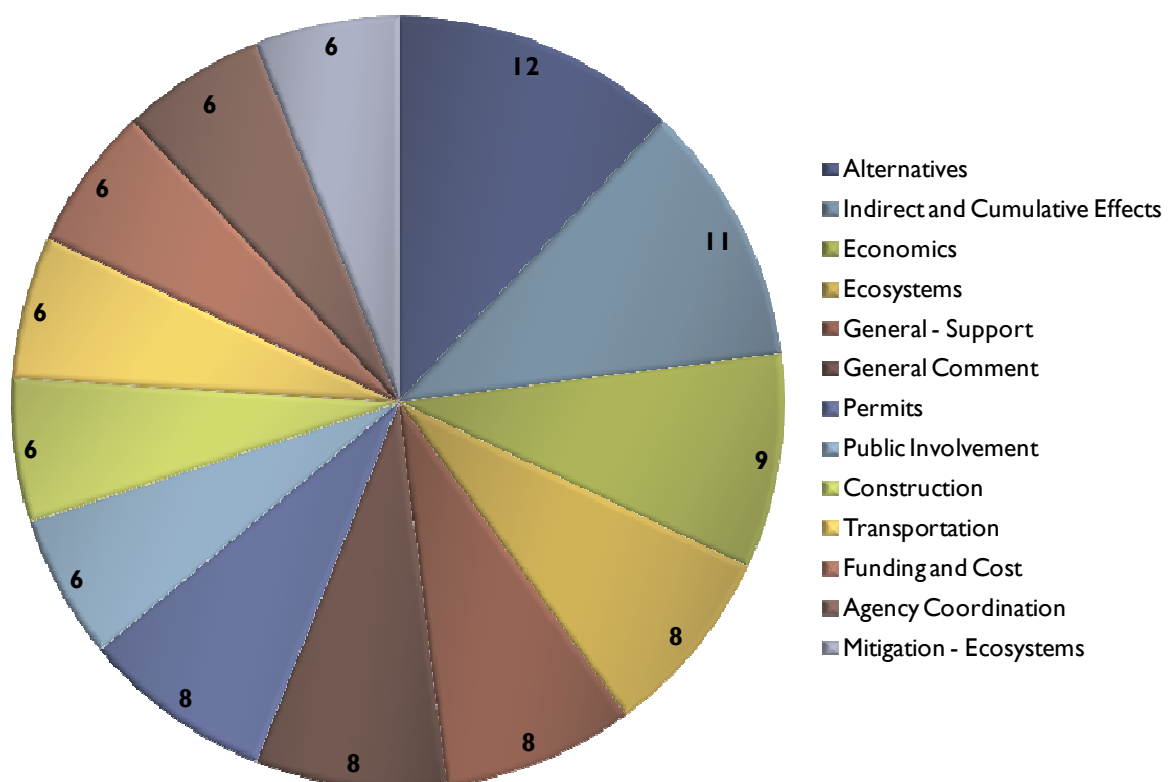


Exhibit 7: Top 13 topics discussed among 32 unique comments.

## What were the key topics discussed by the public?

Of the 32 unique comments, 22 were from the public, including individuals and businesses. The six categories that were most frequently mentioned by the public are shown below.

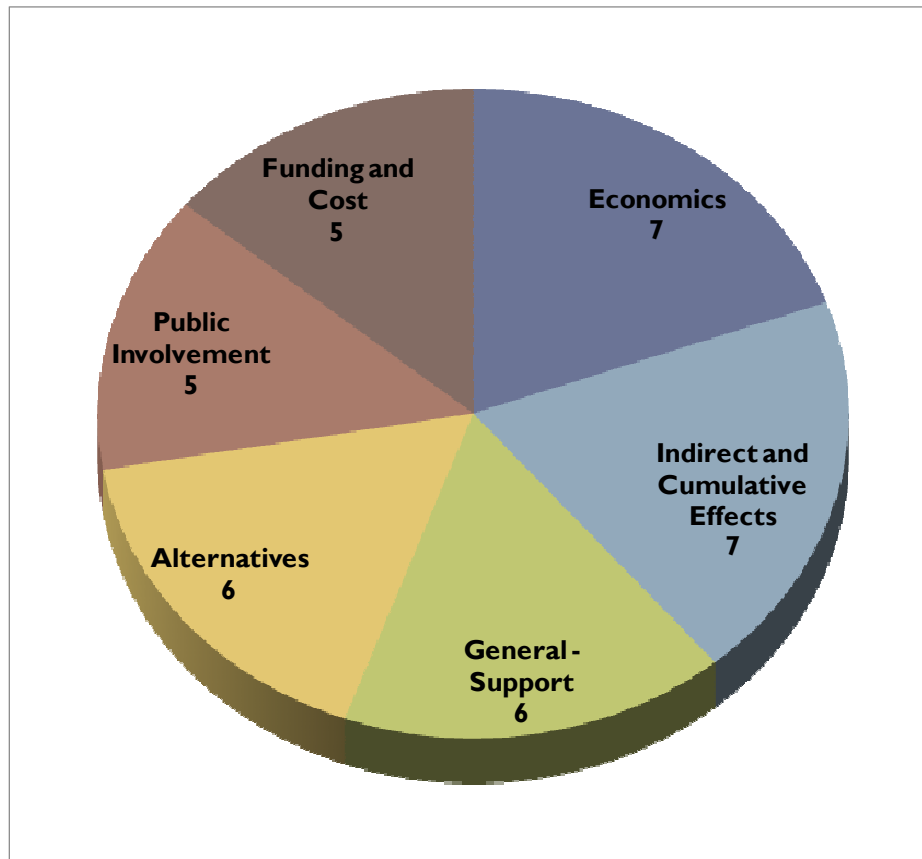


Exhibit 8: Top six topics discussed within comments from the public.

### Economics – discussed in seven comments

This category includes comments related to economic issues. Comments discuss effects on the local economy, local businesses or labor unions, and / or local or regional revenue. This category does not cover use of specific subcontractors, vendors, or material sources.

Sample comments include the following:

- *Low-income, minority, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and environmental justice (EJ) community residents often do not benefit from potential or promised project jobs.*
- *The jobs here are scarce. The project will create jobs and is a direct and indirect investment here.*
- *How did you arrive at the indirect job count?*

## **Indirect and Cumulative Effects – discussed in seven comments**

Comments in this category refer to something caused by the project with effects seen later in time or farther removed in distance, but still reasonably foreseeable. Comments may discuss growth-inducing effects, induced changes to land use patterns, population density or growth rate, and effects on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems. Comments may also discuss issues such as climate change effects, peak oil, carbon neutral, and long term health impacts. The category does not include mention of greenhouse gases, which are grouped with the energy category. This category includes discussion of long-term use of the pontoon casting facility after completion of this project.

Sample comments include the following:

- *Please set up a council to study what to do with this facility after the SR 520 is completed. Perhaps it could have a multiple use versus a single use, in 2015, or after it has served the current purpose.*
- *And the more you can do to keep a facility open once you've done all the things that I'm sure you're going to have to do for the pontoon project, like electrical and plumbing and all that, it's going to be retrofitted and in wonderful shape to do some other kind of an industry, so I'd like to put a strong vote for a solid future with that project.*
- *It is noted that some potential future uses of the Grays Harbor site will be evaluated in a different project EIS process. Don't all known possible uses of the subject site(s) need to be evaluated in this FEIS to look at cumulative environmental side effects?*

## **General Support – discussed in six comments**

Comments in this category express support for the project with no mention of a specific project component, alternative or option (e.g., “great idea,” or “please build as quickly as possible”).

Sample comments include the following:

- *The only thing is I am glad you are still looking to do this project in Grays Harbor.*
- *It looks like you are proceeding by the book, let's get this bridge built!*

## **Alternatives – discussed in six comments**

Comments in this category refer to the Draft EIS discussion of project alternatives. Comments discuss the site identification and screening process.

Sample comments include the following:

- *This is a much needed project for the economy of Grays Harbor County. I fully support the project, believe that Aberdeen Log Yard is the right site, and can't wait for the process to start.*
- *How will the decision to pick the preferred alternative benefit all here? Please provide a brief statement as to the qualitative benefits to the tribes, the locals and the state, for example the cost is less at the Aberdeen site (preferred).*

## What were the key topics discussed by government entities?

Of the 32 unique comments, 10 were from government entities, including federal, state and local agencies and tribes. The six categories that were most frequently mentioned by government entities are described below.

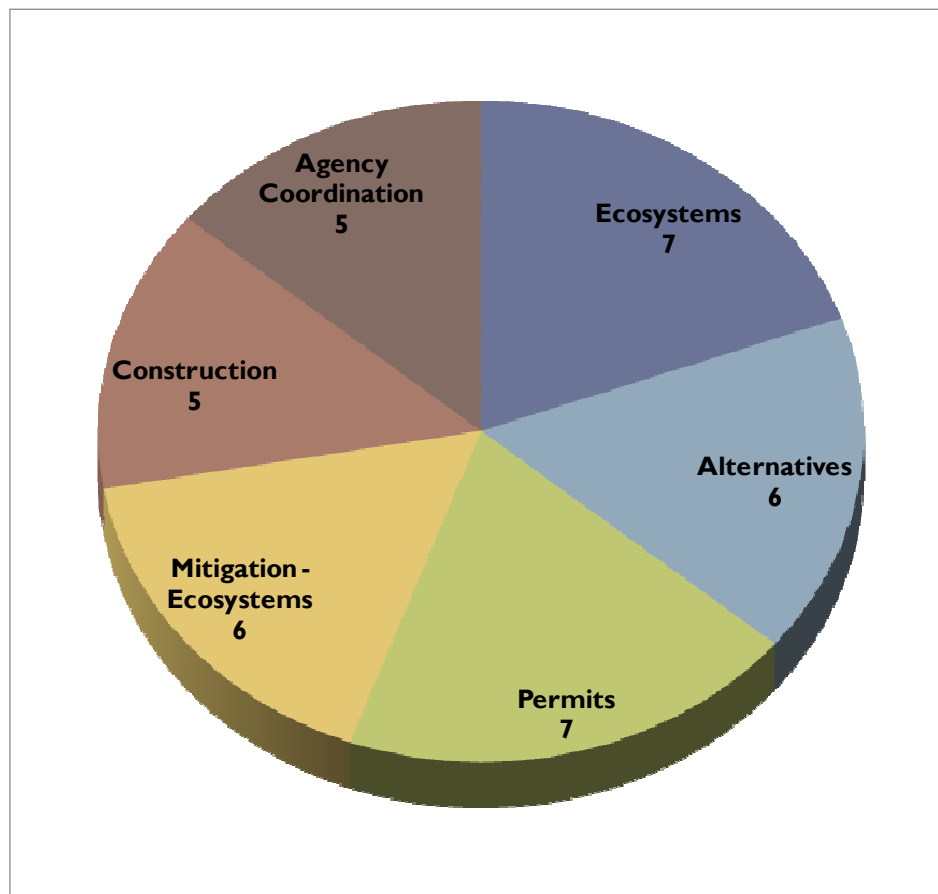


Exhibit 9: Top six topics discussed within comments submitted by government entities.



### **Permits – discussed in seven comments**

Comments discuss permits or permit conditions for the project (federal, state, local). Sample comments include the following:

- *It is noted that the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Sand and Gravel permit is issued by Ecology, and the same is true for the NPDES Construction Stormwater permit – yet that is not noted in the paragraph above.*
- *The subsequent pontoon moorage facility will require a Conditional Shoreline Substantial Development Permit (CSSDP) from Grays Harbor County.*
- *The proposed Grass Creek mitigation project will require a CSSDP from Grays Harbor County.*
- *In the fourth paragraph it states that the state harbor line will have to be relocated for either Grays Harbor project site. What is the process, timeline and likely outcome of such a proposal?*

### **Ecosystems – discussed in seven comments**

Comments in this category refer to the Draft EIS discussion of ecosystems in general, ecological benefits, and habitats. These comments do not include ecosystems mitigation (see ecosystems mitigation comments below).

Sample comments include the following:

- *Just because “forage fish spawning is not known to occur at either build alternative site” doesn’t mean they are not or have not used the area. Herring, for example, are known to spawn on piles and debris throughout Grays Harbor.*
- *We agree that cumulative effects on fish and aquatic resources could likely be minimized through an effective “region-wide cooperative interagency approach or public-private partnership” focused on substantially improving fish habitat conditions and water quality in Grays Harbor and its tributaries.*
- *Given the specific movements of juvenile and adult salmonids past the project area over a year-long period there are very limited windows of opportunity to avoid encountering vulnerable juvenile and adult fish.*

### **Ecosystems mitigation – discussed in six comments**

Comments refer to mitigation for effects to wetlands, aquatic resources, fish, or wildlife.

Sample comments include the following:

- *Installation of piles and dolphins permanently eliminates bed habitat and will need to be included in the mitigation plan.*
- *Your conclusion that no mitigation is needed for work at the existing Concrete Technology Corporation (CTC) Facility does not include loss of fish life and injuries caused by operation of the graving dock.*
- *The Draft EIS has improperly narrowly construed the Nation's interest or concerns to only be in regards to the physical access to fishing areas by its fishers. However, at least as important to the Nation is the continued status of those stocks upon which the Nation's fishers rely, which necessarily includes the habitat for those stocks. The Nation has identified such concerns in attempting to attain windows to avoid juvenile fish encounters in construction and operations of the casting basin, in mitigation of downstream affects of launch channel excavation, in evaluating any potential upriver surface mining impacts on adjacent surface waters, and in seeking appropriate and effective mitigation, etc.*

#### **Alternatives – discussed in six comments**

Comments in this category refer to the Draft EIS discussion of project alternatives. Comments discuss site identification and the screening process.

Sample comments include the following:

- *Under the National Environmental Policy Act, an EIS must include analysis of the direct and indirect effects of the proposed action and all reasonable alternatives, including “no action;” identification of impacts; and discussion of the environmental effects of the alternatives.*
- *Under Grays Harbor Build Alternatives the statement in the second paragraph regarding the additional truck trips for the Aberdeen site versus the Hoquiam certainly seem to support the Anderson Middleton site as the preferred alternative.*
- *Can the portion of the Anderson and Middleton site containing fish traps be avoided if the A&M site were to be used?*

## **What are the next steps for the environmental analysis?**

WSDOT will continue preliminary engineering and design work for the proposed project and continue to work closely with participating and cooperating agencies and tribes throughout the project. WSDOT will pursue additional environmental analysis, if warranted, to better inform and support the alternatives analysis, decision-making, environmental compliance, and mitigation planning, or to address concerns raised by interested parties. A summary technical report will be developed to provide any needed updates to the discipline reports and technical memoranda (appended to this Draft EIS) to include the results of such analysis. These results would also be presented in the Final EIS.

## **What happens to Draft EIS comments?**

WSDOT and FHWA have evaluated all comments submitted in the Draft EIS and will consider further analysis if warranted. Comments received on the Draft EIS will be presented and responded to in the Final EIS and considered before WSDOT and FHWA prepare and issue the Final EIS.

After the Final EIS has been issued, FHWA will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD), which will document the course of action it has decided upon as the federal lead agency. The ROD will identify the selected alternative, explain the alternatives considered, and specify an “environmentally preferable alternative.” It will also explain how the lead agencies plan to implement mitigation measures and conservation actions in compliance with NEPA and other laws. After the ROD is issued, WSDOT will move into the final design and permitting phase and then into construction.

## **What are the next steps for the project?**

Although the ROD is the conclusion of the NEPA process, it signals the beginning of project implementation. WSDOT will further develop the engineering design for the project, including additional detail on project phasing, construction staging, and construction techniques. These designs will be prepared by WSDOT and FHWA, in cooperation with the affected jurisdictions, resource agencies and tribes.

Pontoon construction is planned to begin in 2011, after project permits are received.

## Attachment 1: Number of unique comments associated with each category

The project team categorized each unique comment according to the topics discussed within it. Categories were used to quantify comments that discuss specific design or construction elements, technical disciplines or general areas of interest. The majority of comments were assigned multiple categories. The table below shows the total number of comments that mention each high-level category and associated sub-categories.

Category	No. of comments	Category	No. of comments
Agency Coordination	6	Ecosystems	8
Public Involvement	6	Fish & Aquatic Resources	5
Tribal Coordination	4	Wetlands	1
Air Quality	1	Wildlife	2
Alternatives	12	Energy	1
Anderson & Middleton	4	Greenhouse Gases	1
Anderson & Middleton Favorable	2	Funding and Cost	6
Aberdeen Log Yard	9	Tolling	1
Aberdeen Log Yard Favorable	2	General – Opposition	1
No build	1	General – Support	8
Construction	6	General Comment	8
Contracting	2	Geology & Soils	2
Methods	2	Hazardous Materials	4
Operations	3	Indirect & Cumulative Effects	11
Cultural Resources	4	Long-term Use	10
Economics	9	Information Request	1
Jobs	5	Land Use	2

Category	No. of comments
Mitigation – Ecosystems	6
Mitigation – General	2
Mitigation – Transportation	1
Navigable Waterways	1
Noise	1
Other Environmental Effects	1
Other Projects	3
I-5 to Medina	5
Permits	8
Public Services & Utilities	4

Category	No. of comments
Purpose and Need	2
Schedule	3
Social Elements	1
Environmental Justice	1
Transportation	6
Construction Traffic	2
Materials	2
Non-Motorized	2
Visual Quality	2
Water Resources	3



## **Attachment 2: Public and government entities who commented on the Draft EIS**

### **Businesses – 1 comment**

- MegaMold, Frank Johnson

### **Federal agencies – 2 comments**

- United States Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Army Corps of Engineers

### **Individuals – 21 comments**

### **Local jurisdictions – 2 comments**

- City of Hoquiam
- Grays Harbor County, Planning and Building Division

### **State agencies – 4 comments**

- Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Department of Ecology
- Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Department of Natural Resources, Aquatic Resources Division

### **Tribes – 2 comments**

- Quinault Indian Nation
- Squaxin Island Tribe

### **Contact Information**

SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program  
Pontoon Construction Project  
600 Stewart St.  
Seattle, WA 98101

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[www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr520/pontoons](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr520/pontoons)